

BEAUTY  
AND  
UGLINESS



Global Day of Jewish Learning: Curriculum



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By Rabbi Meir Klein, with Danny Drachsler

## Introduction (10 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

We use the terms “good” and “beautiful” all the time, and we seem to know what the words mean. Try to define them, however, and we are less certain. In the first part of this session we will analyze the story of Adam and Eve eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as we try to understand the concepts “good” and “beautiful” in a fresh light. In the second part, we examine the concept of “beauty” and its relationship to the concept of “good”, through a close reading of Talmudic uses of these terms.

Let’s begin by looking at our assumptions about the words, “good” and “beautiful”.

## Activity: The Spectrum of Good and Beauty

**Facilitator’s Note:** *The following activity can be done as a group, individually or in pairs. Feel free to adapt the activity to suit the tools you have in your learning environment and time constraints. You may also print out the worksheet included at the end of this unit if you are doing the activity individually.*

### Preparation

Draw a grid with an x and y axis on an erasable board, or on poster paper, large enough for everyone to see. At one end of the first axis, write the word “Good”; write “Bad” at the opposite point. Do the same with “Beautiful” and “Ugly” at opposite ends of the second axis.

Optional: cut a few strips of paper on which you can write words that the group will free-associate and suggest. Have some tape, magnets or sticky-tack, or any means of adhering the paper to the grid on display. You may also write the words directly onto the grid.

### Doing the Activity

Ask the group to think of the first things that come to mind when they hear “beauty” and “ugliness” – these can be places, things, feelings, food, celebrities, historical figures, etc... These attributes can be visual, intellectual, behavioral, even smells or sounds. Include or suggest whatever range of nouns you feel is appropriate for your group to use in this discussion. You may also give suggestions to prompt the free-association, such as “sunset”, “spiders”, “chocolate”, “modern art”, “cities”, “makeup”, “classical music”, etc...

Write these suggestions on the slips of paper, or in a list.

Next, taking the list or slips, ask the group where they would place/write each word on the grid, relative to how beautiful, good, ugly or bad they think each thing is. Stick the paper slips onto the grid, or write the words directly onto the grid, depending on the materials you are using. Some items will be in the far corner of a quadrant, others clustered closer to the middle.

The subjective value of each term will show how certain things can be good and beautiful or bad and beautiful, and so on. Leave the grid up during the session. We will come back to it at the end of the discussion, and observe how one’s thinking may change as we study the texts in this unit.

## Part One: The Garden of Eden — Where Good Equaled Beautiful, and Beautiful Equaled Good (25 minutes)

The words “good” and “evil” appear more than once in the story of Adam and Eve. Indeed, the forbidden tree is called “The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil”. Within the same story, the concept of “beauty” is also referred to repeatedly.

**Text #1: Genesis 2:9,16-17, 3:1-7.** English translation by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in *The Steinsaltz Bible*, forthcoming from Koren Publishers Jerusalem.

וַיִּצְמַח ה' אֱלֹקִים מִן־הָאֲדָמָה כָּל־עֵץ נֹחַמֵד לְמַרְאֵה וְטוֹב לְמֵאֲכָל וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע:

וַיִּצְוֶה ה' אֱלֹקִים עַל־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ־הַגֶּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל: וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכַלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

וּבְהִנְחֹשׁ הָיָה עָרוֹם מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר עִשָּׂה ה' אֱלֹקִים. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל הָאִשָּׁה: אֵף כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹקִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הַגֶּן. וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל הַנָּחָשׁ: מִפְּרֵי עֵץ הַגֶּן נֹאכַל, וּמִפְּרֵי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן אָמַר אֱלֹקִים “לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ, כִּן תָּמוּתוּן”. וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחָשׁ אֶל הָאִשָּׁה: לֹא מוֹת תָּמוּתוּן. כִּי יָדַע אֱלֹקִים כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכַלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ – וְנִפְקַחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם, וְהִיִּיתֶם כְּאֱלֹקִים יְדַעֵי טוֹב וְרָע. וַתִּרְא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל וְכִי תֹאנֶה הוּא לְעֵינָיִם וְנֹחַמֵד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׁפִּיל, וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיָו וַתֹּאכַל, וַתִּתֵּן גַּם לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּה וַיֹּאכַל. וַתִּפְקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי עִרְמָם הֵם, וַיִּתְפְּרוּ עֲלֵה תֹאנֶה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגָרֹת.

**2:9** The Lord God grew from the ground every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, and the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...

**16** The Lord God commanded the man, saying: From every tree of the garden you may eat; **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat; for on the day that you eat of it you shall die...

**3:1** The serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman: Did God actually say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden? **2** The woman said to the serpent: From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; **3** but from the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God said: You shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die. **4** The serpent said to the woman: You will not die; **5** For God knows that on the day you eat from it, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as God, knowers of good and evil. **6** The woman saw that the tree was good for eating, and that it was an enticement to the eyes, and that the tree was attractive to apprehend; she took from its fruit and ate; she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. **7** The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; they sewed fig leaves, and made themselves loin cloths.

➤ **Ask these questions, and in answering, ask participants to avoid using the words “good”, “bad”, “evil” and “beautiful”. Notice what other words jump out in the responses:**

1. What are some of the words used to describe the forbidden tree? Based on those descriptions, how would you characterize the tree and its fruit?
2. What, in your opinion, does “the tree was good for eating” mean?
3. Genesis 3:6 says the tree was “an enticement to the eyes” and “attractive to apprehend”, emphasizing the way the tree looks. When Adam and Eve eat the fruit in 3:7, “The eyes of both of them were opened,” which led to them knowing of their nakedness. In your opinion, what is the significance of sight/visual sensation in this story?

4. How do you think the tree looked to Eve before the serpent spoke with her? After the serpent spoke with her?
5. Why do you think Eve did not eat from the tree before her conversation with the serpent? Why did she take and eat from the fruit of the tree after that conversation?

Even though the shape of the tree and its fruit did not change, Eve's perception of its appearance shifted. What was strange and deadly before began to look nutritious, ripe for picking, and useful. Eve seems to see the tree anew, and takes a risk in doubting God's prohibition. Once she and Adam had eaten the fruit, they "knew that they were naked" even though nothing about their bodies had physically changed.

The text says their eyes were opened, but that does not mean to say they were literally blind before eating. Sight is a basic, primal function of human bodies, but it is when our minds ascribe meaning to what we sense with our eyes that our moral senses come forward. Why?

Let's consider the ideas in Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz's commentary on the story. One of the leading scholars of this century, Rabbi Steinsaltz is best known for his commentary on the entire Talmud and for his work on Jewish mysticism.

### **Text #2: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. Discussion of Genesis 3:6. *The Steinsaltz Bible*, forthcoming from Koren Publishers Jerusalem.**

מי שנמשך אל הרע מניח כי קיימים גם דברים שאינם נענים להגדרה הנוקשה של הטוב המוסרי, ושאיף הם טובים: טוב יפה, טוב ערב, טוב שהוא מכשיר יעיל לתכלית אחרת. כשהאשה מגלה כי טוב העץ למאכל, היא מנתקת בין ערכי הטוב השונים. קודם לכן היו ערכי הנאה, המועיל, הערב והראוי מאוחדים, ועתה מופיע לפתע דבר, שאולי איננו טוב מוסרי, מפני שהבחירה בו כרוכה בהמריית פי ה', אך הוא מכיל את כל שאר יסודות הטוב – וביתר שאת.

**The tree was good for eating** – טוב העץ לִמְאֹכֵל: One who is attracted to evil assumes that there are forms of good in this world that do not necessarily fall within the rigid category of the morally good. Such forms of good include that which is beautiful, that which is pleasant, or that which is effective. Before the woman gazed upon the tree, the various forms of good, i.e., aesthetics, pleasure, utility, and morality, were all united. The discovery that the forbidden tree was good for eating shattered this unity between the different forms of good. Suddenly, there was a choice that, while not morally good, as it entailed a rebellion against the command of God, nonetheless incorporated an abundance of all the other aspects of the good (see Sferno, Genesis 2:9: *Minha Belula*).

#### ➤ Ask:

1. In your own words, how does Rabbi Steinsaltz explain the meaning of "good" and "beautiful" before Eve's conversation with the serpent? What about after the conversation?
2. Do you agree with Rabbi Steinsaltz's assessment that there are many layers of "good" that are not necessarily "within the rigid category of morally good"? Is moral goodness really a rigid category?
3. Why do you think Eve ate from the tree: did she believe the serpent or did she act on what she perceived with her own eyes?

Rabbi Steinsaltz suggests that in the Garden of Eden before Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, the concepts of "beautiful", "effective", "pleasant" and "appropriate" were unified in a way that was no longer possible after the eating of the fruit. All things that were "good" were beautiful, and therefore also inherently effective, pleasant, and appropriate; if something was appropriate, then it was also inherently beautiful, effective, and pleasant, and so on. It would have been

impossible for something in the Garden of Eden to be unpleasant but appropriate (such as a rebuke), or inappropriate yet effective (like physical violence).

Rabbi Steinsaltz describes a moment of discovery for Eve, when she begins to separate the layers of “good” according to her aesthetic perceptions, and in doing so, ate the fruit and severed the connection of the layers of goodness. Eve suddenly sees that something can be inappropriate (“you shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it”) yet effective (“good for eating”), pleasant (“an enticement to the eyes”), and beautiful (“attractive to apprehend”). Let’s next consider some of the most important implications of this new awareness for humanity.

Our next text is the commentary by Sforno on Genesis 3:7. Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (c.1475-1550) was an Italian rabbi, commentator, philosopher and physician. He is noted for his mixture of new interpretations and comments from earlier rabbis, while remaining faithful to the original texts.

### Text #3: Sforno. Commentary on Genesis 3:7.

ותפקחנה עיני שניהם נתנו לב אל כל ערב ותענוג אע"פ שיזיק כי שימת לב וההשגחה כדבר תקרא פקחת עין...  
וידעו כי ערומים הם ידעו שראוי לכסות מקום הערוה בהיות מעתה רוב פעולתו מכוונת לתענוג מאוס ומזיק :

**(7) The eyes of both of them were opened:** They paid attention to every pleasing and pleasurable thing, even if harmful, as paying attention and watching over something is called “the opening of the eye”...

**And they knew that they were naked:** They knew that it is fitting to cover the genital area, since now most of its activity is directed toward repulsive and harmful pleasures.

#### ➤ Ask:

1. Once Adam and Eve ate the fruit, Sforno tells us “they paid attention to every pleasing and pleasurable thing.” What do you think they paid attention to before they ate the fruit?
2. Why do the biblical text and Sforno’s commentary focus on the role of Adam and Eve’s eyes?
3. Consider Sforno’s final statement. Why does he believe that, after “the eyes of both of them were opened,” the genital area is focused on “repulsive and harmful pleasures”? What do you think of that association?
4. Both the Sforno and Rabbi Steinsaltz note an essential shift in human nature. How do these changes in human behavior shape your understanding of the terms, “good” and “beautiful”?

The following commentary of Rabbi Steinsaltz on this verse might help us address some of the concerns the Sforno raises.

### Text #4: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. Commentary on Genesis 3:7. *The Steinsaltz Bible*, forthcoming from Koren Publishers Jerusalem.

האכילה מפרי עץ הדעת טוב ורע הכניסה גורם חדש לתודעתם – הפיצול בין הערכים השונים הכלולים במושג טוב: המוסרי, המהנה, האסתטי והשימושי. לא עצם המעשה המיני התחדש להם עתה, שכן כפי הנראה הם הכירו תחום זה גם קודם לכן. אלא שקודם לכן עסקו בו כבעלי החיים, בתמימות מוחלטת וללא פיצול. לאחר שאכלו מפרי עץ הדעת טוב ורע, חדרה לעולמם המודעות למאפיין ייחודי של המיניות האנושית – היצר שאין לו גבולות פנימיים, שאינו מוגדר על ידי ערכים אובייקטיביים. בניגוד ליצרם של רוב היצורים, המשמש כחלק מכורה ביולוגי, והמוגבל על ידי צורך ושובע אובייקטיביים, הם פגשו ביצר התלוי ברצייה. הם התודעו אל יכולתם לעשות או להימנע, ותהום נפערה בפניהם. לכן – “וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עֲלֵהּ תִּאְוָנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חַגְרֹת”<sup>1</sup>. כיוון שאין עירומם ניטרלי, אלא הוא מגרה ומפתה, אין להציגו ברבים, והם הזדרזו לכסותו.

Partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil injected something new into their consciousness: A separation of the various forms of good, namely, aesthetics, pleasure, utility, and morality. This new awareness does not mean that until this point they were unaware of their sexuality. However, before eating of the fruit of the tree, they engaged in the sexual act as animals do, with complete innocence and unselfconsciousness. Now they became aware of the unique nature of human sexuality, and into their world was introduced a new sort of inclination. Unlike the sexual drive of animals, which is part of their biological compulsion and limited by objective factors of need and satiation, the human sexual urge is based on a potentially boundless erotic desire. The man and woman were suddenly faced with their ability to choose to what extent to indulge these newly discovered inclinations, and thus found themselves before a gaping chasm. Consequently, they sewed fig leaves, and made themselves loincloths. Since their nakedness was no longer a neutral state but a source of provocation and temptation, it was not to be publicly displayed; they therefore hurried to cover themselves.

#### ► Ask:

1. How would Rabbi Steinsaltz respond to Sferno's final statement — that, after the eating of the fruit, the genital area is focused on “repulsive and harmful pleasures”?
2. What might be the dangers — or the opportunities — of living in a world in which sexual “inclination [is] dependent on desire alone”?

Adam and Eve have been introduced to a more nuanced world, in which a concept exists in addition to “good” and “beautiful”: they encounter “temptation”. Within temptation, a thing can be both “good” and “not good” at the same time, because it is pleasurable while also being inappropriate, or even appropriate but not pleasurable. In a world where temptation pulls us toward “good” or “evil” options, “there exists jealousy, and eventually, violence. Yet, there is something gained from our position on this cliff's edge: the ability to refrain from “evil” while being aware of the tempting dangers. That conscious resistance to indulge our impulses offers an opportunity: to do good and be actively righteous.

## Part Two: Defining Good and Beautiful (20 minutes)

In this new world — our world — in which something “beautiful” is not necessarily “good”, these words and their opposites (i.e., “ugly” and “evil”) can be applied in unexpected contexts. These uses of the terms can help us more deeply understand their possible meanings.

➤ **Split the group into *chavruta* pairs.** *Chavruta* is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you read and discuss texts together.

Read Text #5 and #6 with your *chavruta*, and discuss the questions that follow. Texts #5 comes from Midrash Tanhuma, a collection of discussions of the Torah passed down through the generations and believed to have been compiled around the 16th century in Constantinople, with a later edition published in the late 19th century. Here, it speaks about Moses’s wife, Tziporah.

### Text #5: Midrash Tanhuma, *Parashat Tzav* 13.

יש לך אשה נאה ביופיה ואינה נאה במעשיה או נאה במעשיה ואין נאה ביופיה, וזו נאה בכל.

There is a woman who is pleasant in her beauty but not pleasant in her deeds; and one who is pleasant in her deeds but not pleasant in her beauty; but this one is pleasant in all regards.

**Text #6: Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Gittin* 70a.** English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the Koren Talmud *Bavli*.

שמונה – רובן קשה ומיעוטן יפה, ואלו הן: דרך, ודרך ארץ, עושר, ומלאכה, יין, ושינה, חמין, והקזת דם.

**Eight** actions are **difficult** for the body and the soul to handle in **large amounts** and are **beneficial** (lit. beautiful, “*yafeh*”) in **small amounts**, and they are: Traveling on the **road**, engaging in the **way of the world**, i.e., engaging in sexual intercourse, having **wealth, work, drinking wine, sleep, hot water, and bloodletting**.

➤ **Discuss the following questions in *chavruta*:**

1. Considering our discussion so far, what are some of the synonyms for the words “good” and “beautiful” suggested by Texts #5 and #6? What about for “ugly” and “bad”?
2. Which of those synonyms for “good” or “goodness” could also be synonyms for “beautiful” or “beauty”? Are there synonyms for “beauty” that could substitute for “good”? Likewise, are there words that cross over between “ugly” and “bad”? What are some words that are synonymous with “good” and “ugly”, or “beautiful” and “evil”?
3. Given the fuzzy boundaries of words like “beautiful” and “beneficial”, what do you make of the list in Text #6 of eight actions that are beneficial only in small amounts? What would your list of eight actions include? Why?
4. What do the relationships between these words and their seemingly-contradictory meanings tell us about our cultural associations between the concepts of good, beauty, ugliness and evil?

## The Good and the Beautiful

We learn from these texts that the meanings of the words “good” and “beautiful” are slippery, and not necessarily symmetrically aligned with the definitions of their supposed antonyms, “evil” and “ugly”. In the case of Text #6 the opposite of “beautiful” is not even “ugly” — it is “difficult”. The Talmud frequently uses *yafeh* (beautiful) to mean “good,” “suitable,” “effective,” “valuable,” “moral,” or “pleasant.”

This relates back directly to that separation of the layers of good that Rabbi Steinsaltz pointed out earlier in our discussion. We are able to connect “opposing” concepts linguistically, psychologically and culturally. Beyond that, we are able to find ways in which the “good” and the “beautiful” can be separated. There is a complex web of relationships between moral goodness, appearance, satisfaction, and the intellectual idea of “good”.

### ► Ask:

1. In Text #5, deeds are referred to as “pleasant”, and that pleasantness is understood to be both a desirable and important aspect of behavior. Is “pleasant” identical to “good” here? In your opinion, what is “good” about “pleasant”? Do you agree with the text?
2. Think back to the conversation between Eve and the serpent, in which she is able to separate “good” from “beautiful”. Of all the possibilities opened up by that distinction, which one is the most surprising to you?
3. Can we ever have a thing that is fully good, as in the Garden of Eden, where all the layers are joined together, and beauty equals good equals appropriate equals pleasant? If yes, what are some examples? If not, why?
4. The interchangeability of many of these words is complicated but deeply ingrained in our language and cultural understanding of their many-layered meanings. What is the significance of that fact to you? How does it affect the way you perceive or feel things?

## Conclusion (5 minutes)

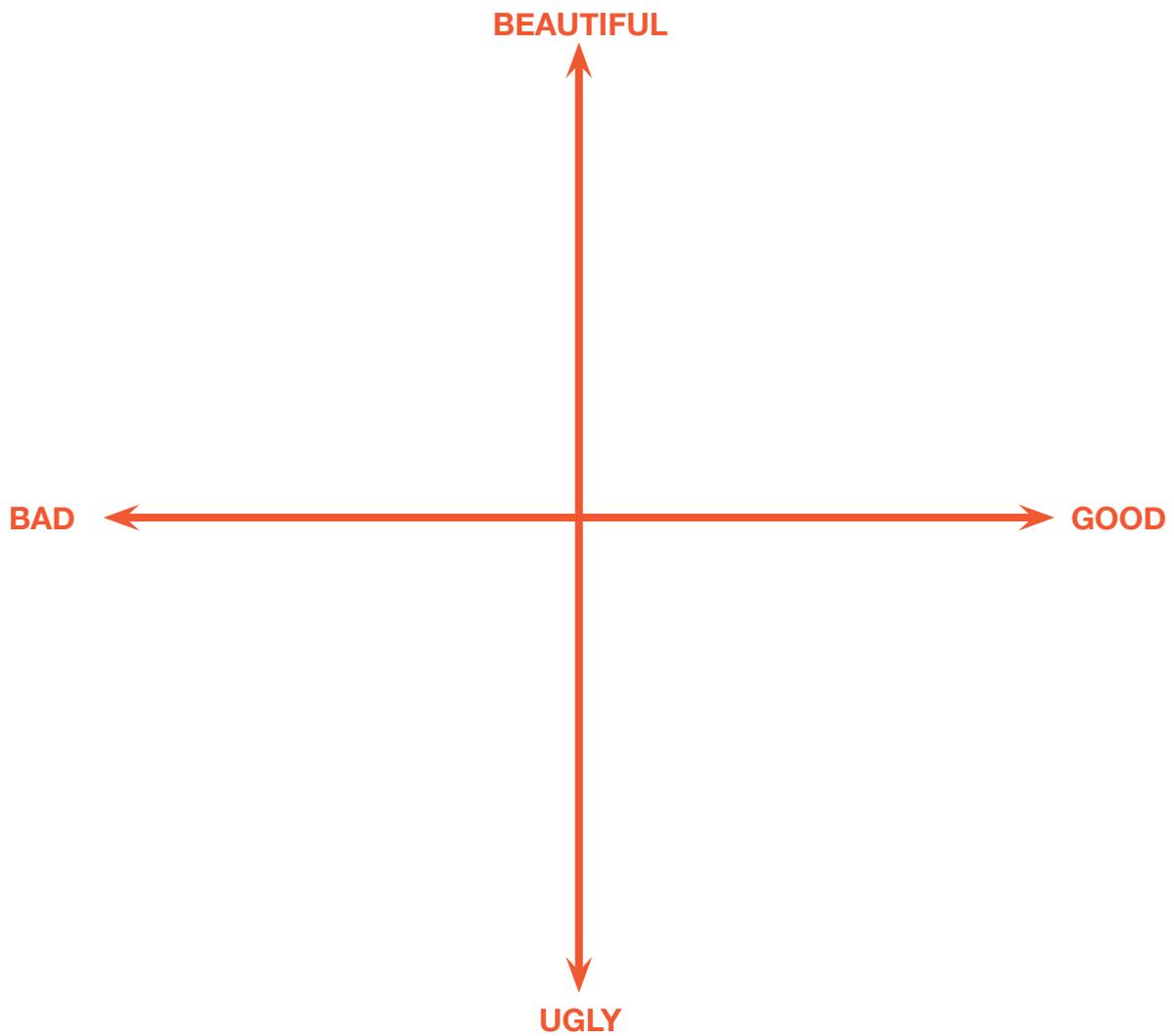
In this unit we dealt with the concepts of “good” and “beautiful,” and discussed how they are used in Jewish sources. We discovered that what is “good” and what is “beautiful” can be clouded by the concept of “desire”. We explored how the ways and situations in which we use language can lead to vastly different understandings of the same words. Let us return to the grid(s) we made in the beginning of the session.

### ► Ask:

1. Consider the relative positions of things you considered “good” and “beautiful. Would you move any of them? Why?

► **Move the words according to any suggestions from the participants, or have participants make changes to their own grids.**

Activity: The Spectrum of Good and Beauty



## Part One: The Garden of Eden — Where Good Equaled Beautiful, and Beautiful Equaled Good

**Text #1: Genesis 2:9,16-17, 3:1-7.** English translation by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in *The Steinsaltz Bible*, forthcoming from Koren Publishers Jerusalem.

וַיִּצְמַח ה' אֱלֹקִים מִן־הָאֲדָמָה קֵל־עֵץ נֹחַמֵד לְמִרְאָה וְטוֹב לְמֵאֲכָל וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע:

וַיִּצְוֶה ה' אֱלֹקִים עַל־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ־הַגֶּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל: וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכַלְתָּ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

וּבְהִנְחֹשׁ הָיָה עָרוֹם מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר עֹשֶׂה ה' אֱלֹקִים. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל הָאִשָּׁה: אַף כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹקִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הַגֶּן. וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל הַנְּחָשׁ: מִפְּרִי עֵץ הַגֶּן נֹאכַל, וּמִפְּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן אָמַר אֱלֹקִים "לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ, כִּן תָּמֹתוּן". וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּחָשׁ אֶל הָאִשָּׁה: לֹא מוֹת תָּמֹתוּן. כִּי יָדַע אֱלֹקִים כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכַלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ – וְנִפְקַחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם, וְהִיִּיתֶם יָדְעֵי טוֹב וְרָע. וַתִּרְאֵהָ הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל וְכִי תֹאמֶה הוּא לְעֵינָיִם וְנֹחַמֵד הָעֵץ לְהִשְׁפִּיל, וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיָו וַתֹּאכַל, וַתֵּתֶן גַּם לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּה וַיֹּאכַל. וַתִּפְקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי עִרְמָם הֵם, וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עֲלֵהּ תָאֲנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם תְּהִלָּת

**2:9** The Lord God grew from the ground every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, and the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...

**16** The Lord God commanded the man, saying: From every tree of the garden you may eat; **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat; for on the day that you eat of it you shall die...

**3:1** The serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman: Did God actually say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden? **2** The woman said to the serpent: From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; **3** but from the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God said: You shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die. **4** The serpent said to the woman: You will not die; **5** For God knows that on the day you eat from it, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as God, knowers of good and evil. **6** The woman saw that the tree was good for eating, and that it was an enticement to the eyes, and that the tree was attractive to apprehend; she took from its fruit and ate; she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. **7** The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; they sewed fig leaves, and made themselves loincloths.

**Text #2: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. Discussion of Genesis 3:6. *The Steinsaltz Bible*, forthcoming from Koren Publishers Jerusalem.**

מי שנמשך אל הרע מניח גם דברים שאינם נענים להגדרה הנוקשה של הטוב המוסרי, ושאלה הם טובים: טוב יפה, טוב ערב, טוב שהוא מכשיר יעיל לתכלית אחרת. כשהאשה מגלה כי טוב העץ למאכל, היא מנתקת בין ערכי הטוב השונים. קודם לכן היו ערכי הנאה, המועיל, הערב והראוי מאוחזים, ועתה מופיע לפתע דבר, שאולי איננו טוב מוסרי, מפני שהבחירה בו כרוכה בהמרית פי ה', אך הוא מכיל את כל שאר יסודות הטוב – וביתר שאת.

**The tree was good for eating** — לְקִאֲמֵל יָעָה בוט: One who is attracted to evil assumes that there are forms of good in this world that do not necessarily fall within the rigid category of the morally good. Such forms of good include that which is beautiful, that which is pleasant, or that which is effective. Before the woman gazed upon the tree, the various forms of good, i.e., aesthetics, pleasure, utility, and morality, were all united. The discovery that the forbidden tree was good for eating shattered this unity between the different forms of good. Suddenly, there was a choice that, while not morally good, as it entailed a rebellion against the command of God, nonetheless incorporated an abundance of all the other aspects of the good (see Sforno, Genesis 2:9: *Minha Belula*).

## Text #3: Sforno. Commentary on Genesis 3:7.

ותפקחנה עיני שניהם נתנו לב אל כל ערב ותענוג אע"פ שיזיק כי שימת לב וההשגחה כדבר תקרא פקיחת עין... וידעו כי ערומים הם ידעו שראוי לכסות מקום הערוה בהיות מעתה רוב פעולתו מכוונת לתענוג מאוס ומזיק:

**(7) The eyes of both of them were opened:** They paid attention to every pleasing and pleasurable thing, even if harmful, as paying attention and watching over something is called "the opening of the eye"...

**And they knew that they were naked:** They knew that it is fitting to cover the genital area, since now most of its activity is directed toward repulsive and harmful pleasures.

## Text #4: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. Commentary on Genesis 3:7. *The Steinsaltz Bible, forthcoming from Koren Publishers Jerusalem.*

האכילה מפרי עץ הדעת טוב ורע הכניסה גורם חדש לתודעתם – הפיצול בין הערכים השונים הכלולים במושג טוב: המוסרי, המהנה, האסתטי והשימושי. לא עצם המעשה המיני התחדש להם עתה, שכן כפי הנראה הם הכירו תחום זה גם קודם לכן. אלא שקודם לכן עסקו בו כבעלי החיים, בתמימות מוחלטת וללא פיצול. לאחר שאכלו מפרי עץ הדעת טוב ורע, חדרה לעולמם המודעות למאפיין ייחודי של המיניות האנושית – היצר שאין לו גבולות פנימיים, שאינו מוגדר על ידי ערכים אובייקטיביים. בניגוד ליצרם של רוב היצורים, המשמש כחלק מכורח ביולוגי, והמוגבל על ידי צורך ושובע אובייקטיביים, הם פגשו ביצר התלוי ברציה. הם התודעו אל יכולתם לעשות או להימנע, ותהום נפערה בפניהם. לכן – "וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עֲלֵה תְּאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חִגְרֹת". כיוון שאין עירומם ניטרלי, אלא הוא מגרה ומפתה, אין להציגו ברבים, והם הזדרזו לכסותו.

Partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil injected something new into their consciousness: A separation of the various forms of good, namely, aesthetics, pleasure, utility, and morality. This new awareness does not mean that until this point they were unaware of their sexuality. However, before eating of the fruit of the tree, they engaged in the sexual act as animals do, with complete innocence and unselfconsciousness. Now they became aware of the unique nature of human sexuality, and into their world was introduced a new sort of inclination. Unlike the sexual drive of animals, which is part of their biological compulsion and limited by objective factors of need and satiation, the human sexual urge is based on a potentially boundless erotic desire. The man and woman were suddenly faced with their ability to choose to what extent to indulge these newly discovered inclinations, and thus found themselves before a gaping chasm. Consequently, they sewed fig leaves, and made themselves loincloths. Since their nakedness was no longer a neutral state but a source of provocation and temptation, it was not to be publicly displayed; they therefore hurried to cover themselves.



## Part Two: Defining Good and Beautiful

### Text #5: Midrash Tanhuma, *Parashat Tzav* 13.

יש לך אשה נאה ביופיה ואינה נאה במעשיה או נאה במעשיה ואין נאה ביופיה, וזו נאה בכל.

There is a woman who is pleasant in her beauty but not pleasant in her deeds; and one who is pleasant in her deeds but not pleasant in her beauty; but this one is pleasant in all regards.

**Text #6: Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Gittin* 70a.** English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the Koren Talmud *Bavli*.

שמונה – רובן קשה ומיעוטן יפה, ואלו הן: דרך, ודרך ארץ, עושר, ומלאכה, יין, ושינה, חמין, והקזת דם.

**Eight** actions are **difficult** for the body and the soul to handle in **large amounts** and are **beneficial** (lit. beautiful, “*yafeh*”) in **small amounts, and they are**: Traveling on the **road**, engaging in the **way of the world**, i.e., engaging in sexual intercourse, having **wealth, work, drinking wine, sleep, hot water, and bloodletting**.



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